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RICE VISITS BEIRUT, WORKS TO OPEN FLOW OF HUMANITARIAN AID

Calls for end to conflict based on Taif Accords, U.N. Resolution 1559

By David Shelby
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington – Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice made a surprise visit to Beirut, Lebanon, July 24 to express U.S. support for the government of Prime Minister Fuad Siniora and to discuss the humanitarian needs of the Lebanese people as hostilities continue between the Israeli Defense Forces and Hizballah militants in the south of Lebanon.

Rice told reporters en route to the region that a major goal of her trip is to “help establish some efforts on the humanitarian side.”

The secretary said most of her recent conversations with Israeli officials have been focused on the humanitarian situation and ways of getting assistance to populations displaced by the conflict.

The United States is “trying to establish corridors in and out of Lebanon, as well as corridors within Lebanon that might make it possible to get humanitarian assistance to the Lebanese people,” she said.

During her trip to the region, the secretary also will meet with regional leaders and representatives from other interested countries at a gathering of the Lebanon Core Group in Rome to seek a lasting, stable cessation of hostilities.

“We believe that a cease-fire is urgent,” she said. “It is, however, important to have conditions that will make it also sustainable.”

The secretary pointed to the 1989 Taif Accords, which brought an end to Lebanon’s 15-year civil war, and U.N. Security Council Resolution 1559 as appropriate bases for ending hostilities. Both the Saudi-sponsored Taif Accords and Resolution 1559 call for the disbanding of all militias in Lebanon and the extension of Lebanese government control over the entire territory of Lebanon. Hizballah continues to maintain an armed presence in the country, particularly in southern Lebanon, the southern suburbs of Beirut and the Bekaa Valley, in spite of these resolutions. A series of Hizballah rocket attacks on northern Israel and a cross-border operation to kidnap two Israeli soldiers July 12 sparked the current round of violence.

Rice said the framework for a resolution to the crisis clearly would provide for “the Lebanese government’s ability to exercise sovereignty over all of its territory, not to have extremist groups, unauthorized armed groups that are able to use the territory of Lebanon to launch illegal activities and then plunge Lebanon and the region into war.”

She said, “If we end the fighting only to have it restart in three weeks or three months, ... then all of the carnage that Hizballah launched by its illegal activities, abducting the soldiers and then launching rocket attacks, we will have gotten nothing from that, we will have learned nothing from it.”

The United States has called on neighboring Syria to withdraw its support for Hizballah, but Rice said she would not be meeting with Syrian officials during her trip to the region because past meetings between American and Syrian officials had proven entirely unproductive. “The problem isn’t that [we] haven’t talked to the Syrians; it’s that the Syrians haven’t acted,” she said.

She said Syria knows what its obligations are under the Taif Accords and Resolution 1559, and she hopes that the broad international condemnation of Hizballah’s actions will make Syria think twice about supporting such activities.

Following her visit to Beirut, the secretary travels to Israel to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. She will also meet with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in Ramallah to discuss the ongoing conflict

between Israel and the Palestinians in Gaza. Israel has been involved in military operations in Gaza since Hamas militants tunneled into Israel June 25 and abducted Israeli Corporal Gilad Shalit from a post near the Gaza border.

After her meetings in Israel and the Palestinian territories, Rice plans to travel to Rome to meet with representatives of an international contact group focused on the crisis in Lebanon.

The transcript of Rice’s remarks en route to the Middle East is available on the State Department’s Web site.

DOHA TRADE NEGOTIATIONS COLLAPSE; U.S. TO CONSULT ON NEXT STEPS

Key countries failed to offer adequate agricultural trade reform, U.S. says

By Bruce Odessey
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- As long-stalled World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations finally collapsed, U.S. Trade Representative Susan Schwab reaffirmed U.S. commitment to a successful conclusion some day and rebutted European Union (EU) statements blaming the United States for the failure.

In Geneva July 24, WTO Director-General Pascal Lamy announced indefinite suspension of the negotiations, following a failed meeting among six major participants. The talks are formally called the Doha Development Agenda because they were launched in Qatar in 2001. Lamy said that concluding the Doha round by the end of 2006, the goal set in 2005, was now impossible. Suspension could last months or even years.

In a teleconference with U.S. reporters later, Schwab said from Geneva that any possible future Doha agreement could not be submitted to the U.S. Congress under existing trade negotiating authority, which expires in July 2007.

Even so, she said, she and U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns were preparing to travel extensively in the weeks ahead to meet with their foreign counterparts about how to move forward.

“We are not giving up now, nor are we going to settle for a mere shadow of Doha’s promise,” Schwab said earlier at a hurriedly scheduled WTO meeting.

The collapse came just a week after leaders at the 2006 Group of Eight (G8) Summit in St. Petersburg, Russia, issued a statement urging 30 days of intense negotiations to break the Doha impasse.

According to Schwab, however, Lamy could not narrow immense divisions among six major participants over opening agricultural markets and cutting agricultural subsidies, the same issues that have blocked movement almost since negotiations were launched.

She reported that the U.S. and Australian delegations returned to Geneva July 23 ready to offer new flexibility in their agriculture position but that other trade partners in the so-called G-6 -- Brazil, the European Union (EU), India and Japan -- did not.

“When we started going around the room it was very clear that no one had budged from the positions they took four weeks ago and, quite frankly, four months ago,” Schwab said.

Even though the United States was willing to go even further than the 60 percent reduction in trade-distorting domestic support spending for farmers offered since October 2005, she said, some other G-6 parties were unwilling to offer real increases in agricultural market access through lower tariffs and other barriers.

She said the small gains in market access others were willing to offer would have been offset by all sorts of proposed exceptions -- for excluding many products altogether and for using broad authority by developing countries for temporarily blocking imports.

According to Schwab, the United States decided against formally offering any new concession on the advice of Lamy, who indicated the G-6 members would have remained far from convergence anyway.

“While the United States has been as much a leader and as forward leaning as could possibly be imagined,” Schwab said, “unfortunately several key developed country and ... advanced developing country trading partners have not played their role.”

Schwab rebutted statements from EU officials blaming the United States for the WTO collapse. “All of the fin-

ger pointing that is taking place is not going to alleviate poverty, not going to help one farmer,” she said.

EU officials cannot hide the fact that their average agricultural tariffs are twice as high and their farm subsidies three times as high as those in the United States, she said.

“They have not been a profile in political courage,” Schwab said.

A transcript of Schwab’s and Johanns’ press availability in Geneva, Schwab’s statement to a WTO meeting and a fact sheet on the Doha negotiations are available on the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative Web site.

U.S.-RUSSIAN EFFORT SEEKS TO PREVENT TERRORIST NUCLEAR ATTACKS

More private-sector and government resources needed to address threat

By Jacquelyn S. Porth
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington – The United States and Russia will hold the first organizational meeting of initial partners of the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism in the next several months.

Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security Robert Joseph answered questions from individuals in India, Israel and the United States about the threat of nuclear weapons falling into the wrong hands during a July 19 web chat at the State Department. The initiative aims “to reduce the risk that terrorists could ever obtain a nuclear weapon or carry out a nuclear attack,” he said. It is designed to take “a comprehensive approach to dealing with all elements of nuclear terrorism risk,” Joseph said.

The two countries unveiled their plans during a bilateral meeting at the July G8 Summit in St. Petersburg. Joseph said this is the first time that the United States and Russia “have come together to form a growing network of partner nations that are committed to taking effective and focused measures to build a layered defense” against nuclear terrorism.

“This layered defense-in-depth requires that partner nations not only improve their interdiction cooperation, but that they also enhance the security of nuclear material, develop capabilities to detect its movement, and improve national emergency response.”

The under secretary said the two countries will invite partner nations to the upcoming meeting “to elaborate and endorse a statement of principles” for the initiative. He said one of those partners will serve as the host for the initial meeting.

“The Global Initiative will build our collective and individual capacity to combat nuclear terrorism on a determined and systematic basis,” the under secretary said, because such activities “require extensive cooperation and interoperability with partner nations across the full range of capabilities, to include prevention, protection and response.”

The initiative will build on Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice’s vision of transformational diplomacy, according to Joseph, “by building consensus among partner nations regarding our most serious international security threat, and galvaniz[ing] them to take concrete and sustained steps to defeat it.”

Asked about the cost of the initiative, he said the amount of money spent “is only one measure of success,” suggesting that how well the money is spent is another measure. Joseph said each partner nation “should be measuring what percent of cargo leaving their ports and arriving ... in the ports of other partner nations is scanned for nuclear or radiological material.”

In addition, he said partners “should be measuring how fast we share operational and technical information ... regarding potential nuclear terrorist threats as they emerge, and seeking new ways to accelerate that information flow.”

Lastly, the under secretary said, each nation should be looking at how fast their emergency response teams can deploy and gain control over dangerous material and how quickly they can respond to calls for assistance from other nations.

Through this initiative, he said the United States and Russia hope to galvanize their respective partners “to spend more resources on this threat, work with the private sector to ensure they allocate more resources to their own risk mitigation activities, and develop concrete

performance measures to ensure that the money we all spend actually makes a difference.”

A transcript of the Joseph web chat is available on the State Department’s web site.

U.S., CHINA, CONTINUE COOPERATION ON WORKER PROTECTION

Labor conditions have improved in last few years, U.S. Labor Department says

By Jane Morse
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- Chinese workers are enjoying improved protections and fewer injuries thanks to intensive cooperative efforts between the Chinese and U.S. governments, according the U.S. Department of Labor.

“Over the past two years, the Labor Department has worked with the People’s Republic of China to strengthen several strategic areas of worker protection: employment standards, migrant workers, pensions, and health and safety -- especially mine safety,” Deputy Secretary of Labor Steven Law said in a July 21 press release.

U.S. Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao and four of her assistant secretaries visited China in June 2004 to discuss bilateral cooperation. As a follow-up, the two countries have exchanged delegations of experts, best practices and information.

The Labor Department also is funding a \$2.3 million safety project that helps China improve worker safety and safety law enforcement in coal mines.

The cooperative efforts have been yielding impressive results, according to the department. At mines participating in the safety project, for example, the number of injuries decreased from 7.7 per 1,000 miners in 2003 to 2.56 per 1,000 miners in 2004. In the first half of 2005, that number was further reduced to 1.86 per 1,000 miners.

Efforts to educate Chinese migrant workers on their workplace rights also have succeeded. Among migrant workers in a Labor-sponsored rule-of-law project, the percentage of workers able to identify three or more

workplace rights increased to 96 percent in the first quarter of 2006 from 23 percent in 2005. During the same period, the department reported that 99 percent of the workers were able to identify at least one place to go for legal assistance -- up from 12 percent in 2005.

The Chinese government currently is revising its laws to improve worker protections. With the assistance from the United States, China is developing a labor contract law as well as laws to handle dispute resolution and social security.

China also is working with the United States to improve its enforcement of labor laws and system of inspections and increase the quality of labor inspectors and labor inspections, according to the press release.

Given the work that the Department of Labor and other agencies have done with Chinese authorities on workplace safety and workers' rights in China, the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) has decided to deny a petition filed by a major U.S. labor organization, the AFL-CIO, under Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974, USTR said in a press release issued July 21.

Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974 authorizes USTR to investigate allegations of unfair trade practices and determine whether those practices affect U.S. commerce. On June 8, the AFL-CIO filed a petition requesting USTR to launch a one-year Section 301 investigation of workers' rights in China. The petition -- similar to a 2004 petition also filed by the AFL-CIO -- also asked USTR to impose trade remedies on China upon conclusion of the investigation.

A news release and a fact sheet on U.S.-China cooperation on workers' rights are available on the Department of Labor's Web site. A statement from the U.S. Trade Representative's spokesman regarding the Section 301 petition is available on the USTR Web site.

Please Note: Most texts and transcript mentioned in the U.S. Mission Daily Bulletin are available via our homepage: <http://geneva.usmission.gov/>

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